783 than others. The wives form the first circle, especially the first
765 wife. They have therefore to perform peculiar purifying cere-
562 monies which throw great light on the profound feelings of the Thongas regarding life and nature. On the other hand they are the property of the husband's family and they are part of his belongings. How are they to be distributed amongst his heirs ? This is a very delicate matter. It is more or less regulated by the tribal law. Hence there are two series of rites to consider, in the customs relating to widows : 1) The rites of purification, 2) the laws of distribution.

783 Let us describe first the fate of the great wife amongst the
765 Rongas (See for supplementary details : The fate of widows amongst the Ba-Ronga. S.A.A.A.S. 1909).

a) *The first day.* Manyibane is dead! — a sad event for his wife. She is called to inspect his grave. She assists silently at his funeral. But as soon as the younger brother of the deceased has finished praying, she bursts into tears and cries aloud! Her parents cry also : "Our child has fallen into misfortune! Now the cold has come for her! She will learn to know the cold water!" This is an allusion to the kind of life which the new widow will have to lead. Every morning she must go to the lake or the pool, with her companions, to have her whole body washed till the days of purification are completed.

783 The first of these purifying rites is performed just after the
765 burial. The widow, surrounded by other women, goes to the
575 pool and there all must wash their bodies. Most of them return home at once. But the widow remains there with *other widows* who have lost their husbands in former years. They form a *secret society* which assembles only to receive new members into its ranks. Nobody must see the strange rites performed by them. It is a *Ngoma* (the same word as for the circumcision school). However, the mysterious company takes possession of the great road (gondjwen), and every one must take care not to pass along it at that time, for great misfortune might overtake the imprudent one who should approach too near and catch a glimpse of the proceedings. A wise man, on seeing the suspicious group

783 of mourning women sitting on the main road, prudently stops and
765 makes a long detour to avoid the place... What is done at this
575 meeting ? One of the widows makes an incision with a knife or a
787 bit of glass in the skin of the new member of the society, in the inguinal region on the left side, "where the husband was resting." If the blood flows freely, it is a good sign. The women are satisfied ; they say there was a good understanding between husband and wife ; if the blood does not flow it is a bad omen. Then one of them lights a little fire with a handful of dry grass ; this grass has been torn from the roof of the deceased's hut. A little excrement from a cock (not a hen!) is then thrown into the fire, and the widow must expose both hands to the smoke. Afterwards she must extinguish the fire with her own water. Should she be unable to do this, it is a further proof that she has not been faithful to her husband and that she has killed him by her adulteries. These rites are very similar to the first circumcision rites, the incision performed recalling the ablation of the foreskin, and the exposure to the smoke, the jumping over the fire. These are great taboos. Evidently they are initiation rites, accompanying the passage from one condition to another. Why does the ceremony take place on the main road ? Because later on the contamination of death will attach itself to travellers passing that spot, and the mourners themselves will get rid of it in this way.

783 After that, the company returns home. The other widows
765 take every bit of clothing from their companion, and tie a reed or a
575 palm thread around her waist with some broad leaves attached
292 to it. With this scanty garment, they bring her home. She walks surrounded by them. Someone warns the men to leave the road as they are not allowed to see the procession. They hide themselves in their huts. The widow is led to her hut, the hut of the great wife which has now been uncrowned. She must accomplish *the last crossing of the hut*. Entering through the door, she shouts loudly : "My husband! My husband! You have left me alone! What am I to do ?" Then she goes out, not by the door but by the hole which has been made in the wall to carry the corpse to the grave. Behind the hut her friends are waiting for her and give her back her old clothing, which has been

783 washed in the pool and which she will wear again for two days (1).
765 b) *The following days of the Great Mourning.* Without delay a new hut, a small provisional hut, is built in front of the mortuary one. Here the great wife will stay during the whole of her widowhood: the space between this and the old hut is more or less taboo and most of the possessions of the deceased are placed there, under the roof near the door on the outside. (See illustration p. 159.)

The other widows do not leave their huts, but they participate in the other purifying acts, the vapour baths and the general sprinkling of the fifth day. As regards the vapour baths, however, the first wife is associated with the grave-diggers, viz. she must be exposed to the strongest medicinal smoke, while the inferior wives are cleansed with weaker drugs. They all put on the *malopa* and eat with spoons during the whole year of widowhood.

587 595 728 768 604 c) *Provisional decision regarding the fate of the widows.* A few days after the Great Mourning, a fresh gathering takes place, not in connection with the defilement of death, which is now provisionally cleansed, but *to settle provisionally the fate of the widows.* The sisters of the deceased have to play a special part in this gathering. They will lead the discussion with the widows about their new husbands. It is indeed a happy custom to let women decide on the subject. Not that they have unrestricted power in the matter. The law has provided a certain rule for the distribution and this is seldom departed from. However, some liberty is allowed in its application, and modifications can better be made if proposed by female intermediaries. Should the husband possess a harem (tshengwe), that is at least five wives, they will most likely be given to the following heirs. The great wife, being "the pole of the

575 783 765 (1) *Widowers* also form a similar society and undergo the same rites; but just as it was only the great wife who was subject to these laws, to the exclusion of the little wives, so it is only when he has lost his first wife that a man is initiated into the widowers' society. After having buried her (he holds her head) he goes to the pool, washes himself, and another widower comes and makes the incision in him in the inguinal region. Then he throws away his *shifodo* (Annotatio 1.) and also carries out the same crossing of the hut in tears. These three acts constitute the actual widower's mourning: the vapour baths and *Yahla khombo* are part of his purification as being the principal grave-digger.

1 [See category 11c --Analyst]

768 The sun is now setting. All the men go to the central place of
575 the village and sit round the fire. The widows remain on the
533 spot, between the deceased's hut and the new hut of the great wife, where all the belongings of the late husband have been kept during the whole year. The other widows of the family surround them once more ; no other woman is allowed to approach. The present ceremony is another secret rite of the company of widows. They sing the following mourning song to recall all the sufferings of the year of widowhood :

Angoma nkulukumba ! Tatana a nga fa, a ba siya
Na ngoma a nga si ba byela !
Our secret law is a great law ! Our father has gone, he has left them,
And he had not told them about that law !

768 During this song the old women take away all the clothing of
587 the widows, and wash their bodies. Then they lead them into the hut of the great wife and put on them new clothing, the clothes which their suitors and other relatives have brought for them. When they are all seated, the sisters of the deceased proceed to the last distribution. They first ask the great wife : "You, to whom do you belong ?" She answers : "Do you not know him ? It is the man who has taken care of me, who has been visiting me ! I choose so and so !" She may also say : "I kill so and so !" *(Ndji dlaya man)*. That means : "As I have killed my first husband, I might do the same for the second," a very promising declaration ! As soon as the widow has given her answer, the women in the hut begin shouting loudly, and one of them goes out to the men, and cries : "So and so says she kills so and so !" They proceed to ask another : "You, whom do you choose ?" The woman remains silent. "What do you mean ?" — "I do not choose anybody." — "How is that ? Be sensible !" — "No ! I do not want anybody !" — "Why ?" They begin to press her : "You know well who has taken care of you, who has visited *(tsambela)* you the whole year." — "I do not want him !" — "How is that possible ?" — "No, I do not want him. I want the *ntukulu* so and so." A frightful noise is heard in the hut ; they are all shouting together. What has happened ?